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Wedgwood . With Machine - Guns
at Gallipoli . 1915

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FROM

..... Bequest of

..... Dr. Benjamin Rand

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WITH MACHINE-GUNS IN GALLIPOLI.

BY

Lieutenant-Commander JOSIAH WEDGWOOD,
M.P., D.S.O.

Reprinted from the "Westminster Gazette."

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I.

"This is my seat in the stalls, and there are many men in England would give £1,000 for it," said the Hon. Arthur Coke as he fixed on the site for his maxim-casemate on the forecastle of the *River Clyde*. They were to be a grim sort of stalls, and cost him his life, but it cheered up the mechanics who had volunteered to go on the forlorn hope on the "Wooden Horse of Troy"; they had been rather depressed by the unexpectedly touching farewells of their friends on the transport who had not volunteered. This old tramp steamer was commanded by a dug-out half-pay captain who dreamed of lighters, a midshipman of Adonis-like beauty from the merchant marine, and an engineer from (6521—8.) Wt. 36908—G 5405, 11,000. 11/15. D & S. G. 2.

the River Plate, who would describe to us with unnecessary zest how he was going to get two extra knots out of the old tub to "boost" her ashore by sitting on the safety valve. Meanwhile, our mechanics built casemates, armed her with maxim guns, and lined her bridges with boiler plate and leaky sand-bags.

On a flawless Sunday morning, as the mist rose from the semi-circle of the bay, we ran ashore 400 yards from the mediæval castle of Seddel Bahr. I never noticed the grounding, for the horror in the water, on the beach. Five tows of five boats each, loaded with men, were going ashore alongside of us. One moment it had been early morning in a peaceful country, with thoughts or smells of cows and hay and milk; and the next, while the boats were just twenty yards from the shore, the blue sea round each boat was turning red. Is there anything more horrible than to see men wading through water waist-high under a heavy fire? You see where each bullet hits the water, which, like a nightmare, holds back the man for the next shot,

which will not miss. Of all those brave men two-thirds died, and hardly a dozen reached unwounded the shelter of the five-foot sand dune.

Then they charged from the Wooden Horse. From the new large ports on the lower deck they ran along gangways to the bows, then over three lighters to a spit of rock; twenty slippery yards over the rocks, and there was shelter. I think this was more terrible. In the first rush none got alive to land; and they repeated these rushes all day. There was no room on the rocks; there was no room on the lighters and boats; they were so covered with dead and dying. A dash about nine o'clock was led by General Napier and his Brigade-Major. Would they ever get to the end of the lighter and jump into the sheltering water? No; side by side they sat down on the engine coaming. For one moment one thought they might be taking cover; then their legs slid out and they rolled over.

It was the Munsters that charged first, with a sprig of shamrock on their caps; then the Dublins, the Worcesters, the

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Hampshires. Lying on the beach, on the rocks, on the lighters, they cried on the Mother of God. Ever when I looked ashore I saw five Munsters. They at some moment had got ashore; they had been told off to cut the wire entanglements; they had left the shelter of the bank, charged fifteen yards to the wire, and there they lay in a row at two yards interval. One could hardly believe them dead. All the time great shells kept hitting the shivering ship and doing slaughter in the packed holds. These shells were fired from Asia, but it was the maxims and pom-poms in Seddel Bahr and on the amphitheatre that kept our heads down below the bulwarks and boiler-plate. There, now, was Midshipman Drury swimming to the lighter which had broken loose, with a line in his mouth and a wound in his head. If ever a boy deserved his V.C. that lad did. And there was the captain of the *River Clyde*, now no longer a ship to be stuck to but a part for ever of Gallipoli, alone with a boat by the spit of rock, trying to lift in the wounded under fire.

All these things I saw as in a dream as I moved from casemate to casemate, watching to see Turks, wearing an "Election smile," and trying to pretend in an even voice to men who had never seen death that this was the best of all possible worlds. Columns of smoke rose from the castle and town of Seddel Bahr as the great shells from the fleet passed over our heads and burst; and in every lull we heard the wounded.

I looked at the Commander on the spit of rock trying to lift in the wounded, and every splash by his side meant a bullet. The Colonel, the second in command, was shot through the head on the bridge. One of my men came to me: "May I go over and help get in those wounded?" "Why?" I said, and I remembered the story of Stephen Crane's of the man who went across the shell-swept field to get a drink because he was "dared to" by his companions. "I can't stand hearing them crying." He went with the second lot, but another of my men had been before him, and he had dived in, without leave, being a

single-Taxer from Glasgow. He was shot through the stomach but lives. The Turks could easily have killed all those who went to the wounded. They did not fire on them sometimes for ten minutes, and then a burst of fire would come. Then and afterwards I found them extraordinarily merciful as compared with the Germans in Flanders.

At twelve I had given up all hope; one gun on the ridge, and we should be smashed to pieces. At one o'clock I got 20,000 more rounds from the fleet, and the Lancashires were appearing over the ridge to the left from "Lancashire Landing." We saw fifteen men in a window in the castle on the right by the water. They signalled that they were all that remained of the Dublins who had landed at the Camber at Seddel Bahr. At three o'clock we got 150 men alive to shore, and great chunks were flying out of the old castle as the "15" shells from the *Elizabeth* plastered the ten-foot walls. We watched our men working to the right and up into the castle ruins—at each corner the officer

crouching in front with revolver in rest. One watched them through the fire zone, and held one's breath and pressed the button of the maxim.

Then night came, but a house in Seddel Bahr was burning brightly, and there was a full moon. We disembarked men at once. All around the wounded cried for help and shelter against the bullets, but there was no room on boats or gangway for anything but the men to come to shore. For three hours I stood at the end of the rocks up to my waist in water, my legs jammed between dead men, and helped men from the last boat to the rocks. Every man who landed that night jumped on to the backs of dead men, to the most horrible accompaniment in the world. It was then that I first learnt the shout of "Allah," for the Turks charged. All night long the battle raged. On shore everyone was firing at they knew not what. Our men went up the hill through the Turks; and the Turks came down through ours to the beach. Over and past each other they went, sometimes not seeing, sometimes glad to

pass on in the darkness. One party of our men were found by daylight at the top of the gully on the left in touch with the Lancashires. It is not necessary to burn your boats to ensure the courage of desperation; it is as good to have your ship firmly aground. The paladins of that night's fighting knew this and knew what was their position.

You must remember that for two nights no one had slept; and then another day dawned. We were firmly ashore at Lancashire Landing, and at Du Toit's Battery to the north-east; and the Australians were dug-in at Anzac. An end had to be made of V Beach. The whole fleet collected, and all morning blew the ridge and castle and town to pieces. And all the time that wonderful infantry went forward up the hill and through the ruined town. The troops that went in that attack had already lost half their strength; the officers that led up those narrow streets, dodging first through gateways, across the openings, and beckoning when safe for their men to come on, were nearly all

killed. Dead-beat, at one o'clock, before the final rush they hesitated. Then our last colonel, a Staff man, Colonel Doughty Wylie, ran ashore with a cane, ran right up the hill, ran through the last handful of men sheltering under the crest, took them with that rush into the trench, and fell with a bullet through his head. But the Turks ran and the ridge was ours.

I had to take the maxim guns up, skirting the village. If you have never felt afraid, try crawling up a gutter, crawling over dead men, with every wall and corner hiding a marksman trying to kill you. We got the guns into position, and then cleared that village, peering into dark rooms and broken courts in the growing twilight. Everywhere were our dead Munsters and Dublins, some horribly mutilated and burnt. No wounded had survived. Two German officers were found and killed. These fiends, it appears, had instigated the things done to those dying Irishmen; and we never afterwards found similar Turkish atrocities. The Turks are the

finest and best fighters in the world, save only the Canadians and Australians.

Of that 29th Division that landed on V Beach, and was finally exterminated within the fortnight that followed the landing, one knows not how to write. On and on, by day and night, ever getting fewer and fewer, they pushed forward till the ground was sown with them. They had never been in action before; they had come from all the corners of the world, from Burma and Pretoria, from the Himalayas and Bermudas, and they all rest in Gallipoli; and may God rest their souls. There was once a division of which much has been written that charged over the fatal hill of Albuera; but their losses were nothing like these. Henderson taught us that Sharpsburg, where one-third of all the Federals and Confederates were left on the field, was, for the numbers engaged, the bloodiest battle in history. Sharpsburg was a joy ride compared with Seddel Bahr. So by this one knows that the men of our race in the past have left bigger men behind them, bigger at least in soul and in the spirit of sacrifice.

II.

“Cease firing there, damn you!” The night alternated between ingenuous bursts of fire which infected all the line, and the curses of the officers who tried to stop it. It was our first night on Gallipoli, and we had a graveyard in front of us. Even a grave-stone under the moon will look like a Turk—after the losses we had suffered. Next morning the blue-coated French relieved us in the trenches, and the 29th went forward. They were flung forward on Krithia.

I did not see the first part of that battle as each regiment went blindly over the moors, driving in the snipers and striking against the machine-guns. It was one o'clock when I was moved up in the centre to “push them into Krithia.” Our men went up through the wreckage of this desperate attack—the wounded, the men helping the wounded, growing ever more numerous, the men who are coming back to get more ammunition. How well one knows them and their terrifying

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stories, begging you to go no further. "Sheer murder at the next bend of the nullah." But our guns thumped above our heads, bursting in the orchard, and with a mixed crowd of English, Scotch, French, and Irish, rallied men that turned again as soon as they saw an officer, we went up to Krithia, as though it were Calvary.

Then we dug those remnants in—Munsters, Dublins, Lancashires, Worcesters, Essex, Royal Scots, the Foreign Legion, and the Turcos. They dug in lying on their stomachs, till one after another, becoming a man, found it safe to stand up and dig. And blessed night came, with wind and rain, most vilely cold for men who had cast their overcoats in the sweltering heat of mid-day. We had no flares, no barbed wire, and stood at gaze shivering.

Next day we dug in again elsewhere, and in the sun we began to take a joy in our cave dwellings. At that time we had only Turkish shells to fear, and could wait outside for the note, and then run and jump to safety underground. The

exercise kept us fit and became amusing; their shrapnel was a supreme joke when it hit the wrong side of your trench. And the French next door had excellent coffee. We were so glad to be still alive that it was a very happy family. Our General came round, walking rapidly between the shells and jumping acutely, to deliver us lectures on how to entrench. "These trenches," he said, "date from the time of Noah." We reminded him gaily of the proximity of Troy. But that night the Turks attacked.

They came with the rising of the moon. The first shell came at 10 p.m. as I lay in my sleeping sack outside the trench for space. I heard it come like fifty express trains in my sleep, and with a convulsive wriggle shot myself and bag into the trench. No one who has not heard shells has any idea of the speed with which they travel, or the rage with which they burst.

Then the sing of the bullets; then our flares, great crests of blue fireworks, began to go up from agitated officers who could, or could not, see. Under these

ghastly flares you see—for five seconds—Turks as tussocks and tussocks as Turks. I believe the regiments on our left were firing from nerves when they were actually being rushed; and the first one knew of disaster were the shouts, as of a football crowd, on my left rear, where the “fedais” charged the Hampshires in our second line. The Hampshires killed those that got there, even as they killed the Hampshires. When I walked down to see how they were progressing that gallant regiment had one captain and one subaltern left. It was then that Major Leigh died, and his adjutant and Colonel Smith, of the Artillery, were joined in death in that black *mêlée*. One did not know where the Turks were; how they got in our rear. And now the football-crowd-shout, which seemed to resolve into “Allah,” “Allah,” came from our right rear also. I knew that they were through the French, too, and charging our horse artillery, who were firing at point-blank range in the darkness of the night. I had exhausted my flares, and lit up the ground in front of

the trench by volleys of fire which showed Turks, always silent and creeping forward—but they were really dead.

Up to us from the black road behind came the Royal Scots—Territorials. They had been in reserve, after that frightful 28th. Out of the night they came. “Where are the Turks that have got through?” and off they filed into the night. There was silence for perhaps ten minutes, and then the splutter of the rifles, the shouts of the charge. Off went the Essex after them—splutter, shouts. It was only midnight, and till 4.30 no man knew how that bayonet work on the left was faring, least of all those gallant Territorials, who could not tell from minute to minute whether they were charging fifty or 5,000.

Somewhere in the valley on the right was a man calling on “Maria,” and one prayed most to hear the guns of the Horse Artillery, an assurance that they were not captured. I do not know who makes the French ammunition; but they are above all men blessed. All that night long, like clockwork, their .75 shells

passed thumping ten feet overhead. One felt one hold on hope and sanity; one thing left solid; they would pump on through eternity and hold the fort. Each burst gave us a little light.

"Allah Allah, la illah illah Allah." There must be another wave going through the French in the valley. "There is no God but God, and Mahomed is His prophet." "Train your gun more into the valley." "Don't you hear me, Rhys Evans, get your gun onto the valley." "He's dead, sir!" So in the black trench that brave dentist died with his thumb on the Maxim push and his eyes straining into the darkness beyond the parapet.

At last the dawn came red over Achi Baba. The black forms lying in the grass in front began to show up. Figures were moving away in the night. Till one could make out which way those figures were moving no one knew whether we were cut off or saved. "The Turks run!" To right and left they were in flight. The relief after that night's tension made one turn and solemnly

shake hands. The Senegalese bayoneted the Turks on the right; the Lancashires and Essex were after them on the left; and the guns caught them on every skyline; and so the 2nd of May came up.

This day saw the baptism of the Naval Brigade—the *Howe*, the *Anson*, and the *Hood*. We were to press the Turks at once on their repulse, and at eleven a.m. the Naval Brigade went forward on the right of the Krithia road, the French on their right in the valley, and the everlasting 29th on the left. Half an hour later what were left came marching coolly back. Seasoned troops would have come back hunching themselves small and going quickly; these came back under a thunderstorm of shrapnel, a little white in the gills, as wondering why war was made like this, but ramrod straight and without talking. I saw three separate men go out from the trench into that torrent of shrapnel to carry ammunition to their maxims. It takes courage for a man alone to go to the front when everyone else is being blown to the rear by blasts of shrapnel.

We borrowed some barbed wire from the French. The Turks seemed to have trebled their gunfire, which never stopped all day, as we prepared for another night.

Night after night—2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th—the Turks rushed upon us, but never again did they get through, or even home on to our parapet. On the 6th we were to advance.

Things happened in this way. At ten p.m. a message was passed to me in the trench to report at once at divisional headquarters, and I wandered off four miles to the beach, tumbling over peat hags. There the General gave me supper and instructions; and I set off to walk back at midnight, very tired. Half-way back I could go no further, and the orderly and I sat down; he was a son of the manse, and as we sat there in that hubbub he talked of his old University till I could get up and go home to the trench.

At eleven next morning the three days' battle began. The whole line went forward. I had now thirty maxims in my charge, to get forward to the right place,

show the target, and dig in—a hen with too many chickens. One's narrative must become personal. I ran from gun to gun till I was hit. At the last it came as a surprise.

This is what happens to the wounded. There was a crash, and I and another man were on the ground. A cart-horse might have kicked me. The pain was all present, and gingerly I felt underneath to find if the blood were dripping. It was all nasty wet clothes. My eyes hunted for possible cover. Two who had never faltered ran to help me, jumping out of their hard-dug gun-pits. I was not for moving just then; one could only beg them to go away. I was conscious that the gun close to me was not being worked, and that bullets were chipping the stones round me. That gave me at last a sudden panic, and I tried to crawl off back to that blessed home of a trench that I had left in the morning a whole man.

Undoubtedly in the treatment of the wounded you see mankind at its best. The wounded man is, in a moment, a

little baby; and all the rest become the tenderest of mothers. They carried me in in whispers. One of my men gripped my hand as they cut away the clothes; another lit a cigarette and put it between my teeth. They crooned over me. Before this war it was given to few to know the love of those who go together through the long valley of the shadow of death and have learnt to trust each other to the end.

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